EM Recovery NEWS FLASH

June 1, 2011

Recovery Act Funding Leads to Record Year for Transuranic Waste Shipments

CARLSBAD, N.M. – With the help of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) received the most transuranic waste shipments in a single year since waste operations began there in 1999.

The 1,194 shipments WIPP received for safe, permanent disposal in 2010 beats a previous record of 1,144 shipments in 2006.

The Recovery Act accelerated the cleanup of transuranic waste generated by past U.S. defense activities at several sites across the DOE complex. More than $1.7 million from the Recovery Act funded the removal of all legacy transuranic waste from the Nevada National Security Site, General Electric Vallecitos Nuclear Center, and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory-Site 300. More than 2,500 cubic meters of contact-handled and 65 cubic meters of remote-handled transuranic waste were certified for disposal at WIPP using Recovery Act funds.

Top photo: A shipment of contact-handled transuranic waste makes its way to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

Map to right: Transuranic waste cleanup is complete at several sites across the DOE complex. The Recovery Act accelerated some of those cleanups.

Transuranic waste cleanup is on track for completion by September 2011 at Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory in Pennsylvania, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California, Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois, NRD (Nuclear Radiation Development) LLC in New York, and Sandia National Laboratory in New Mexico.

The increase in waste certification at small quantity generator sites, such as Bettis and NRD, resulted in the need for additional transportation routes to ship the waste to WIPP. The Recovery Act invested in preparations for the new routes. Preparing a route for transuranic waste shipments requires training first responders along the route and briefing elected officials and state personnel about WIPP and its mission.

Transuranic waste is contaminated with radioactive elements that have atomic numbers greater than uranium. The waste is permanently disposed safely in rooms mined out of an ancient salt formation more than 2,100 feet below the surface at WIPP.